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THE WASH-BASIN

A third supernatural element which must be in good condition if a Bella Coola is to prosper in life, is a *nuskelusta*, wash-basin. In the land above, *Älquntäm* has a large one filled with water which, having been constructed by himself, is replete with power. When a child is born, a small part of this receptacle, with its contents, is reserved for him; the supernatural artisans choose the actual section, but it is *Älquntäm* who gives them the ability to do so. A fortunate man, whose ventures are successful and to whom goods are attracted, is said to have a good wash-basin; whereas the ill-luck of an unfortunate person is attributed, among other reasons, to the small size of his supernatural vessel. The Bella Coola have no clear ideas about the connection between an individual and his wash-basin. Some state that it remains in the land above; others believe that its intangible essence comes to a child at birth and grows up with him, always near his body, as if it were the offspring of the basin in the land above. As long as it remains in motion the owner continues in good health and prosperity, but if it becomes sluggish he falls ill. Long ago, shamans knew how to reanimate a wash-basin, but since the time of the first people, when supernatural ability was common, this has been a lost art. Senile decay is attributed to listlessness of this possession.

River water, being a creation of *Älquntäm*, is akin to the water in his basin above. Boys are always advised to bathe in the river at dawn; the act is termed *äskelusam*, a word connected with *nuskelusta*. A prayer is uttered while washing. The combination of verbal appeal and the application of water strengthens the petitioner's wash-basin and so increases his chances for prosperity. Until a few years ago, this practice was almost universal. Water is always considered a strange substance, obviously a supernatural creation, and believed to be the chief means of sustenance for a child after being weaned.[80]

[80] This may be a mere rationalization.

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place where he is not likely to be disturbed, and addresses the supreme god in a loud tone of voice, requesting his assistance. 782

Although prayers can be said at any time of the day, or at any season of the year, there are occasions when they are more potent than at other times. At dawn, for example, a wise young man is accustomed to go alone to the river to wash and pray. He enters the icy water, blows mucus over his hands, and rubs his body vigorously[11] either with a smooth pebble, or, if it can be obtained, with a stone taken from the stomach of a sea-lion.[12] As he scours himself, he asks *Mınakais* to grant him long life, power, success, and strength. On coming from the water, he repeats his request, and then washes himself again. This process is repeated four times, making eight prayers in all. A young man who does this habitually, and in other ways placates the supreme deity, is likely to have success, and may even be given supernatural assistance by one of the many anthropomorphic or zoomorphic creatures. The underlying belief is that *Ălquntăm* actually hears the words spoken and, pleased thereby, aids the petitioner either directly, or by strengthening the supernatural elements in his body. [783]

Mınakais has power over both rain and dry weather, and is petitioned for whichever is desired. When the sun is obscured by rain clouds, the Bella Coola pray: [821]

"Please clean your face, *Mınakais*," or,

"Please show us your face, we need you."

Before a man starts on a journey, either by canoe or on foot, he always asks help for his undertaking. [484]

"*Mınakais*," he prays, "Be with me," or "Go before me," or, "Give me what I want."

Corresponding to the importance of the occasion, prayers are always made before the departure of a hunting or war [224] [726] [785]

[11] Urine was formerly used for washing both the body and clothing. It was followed by the application of clean water, and undoubtedly had a religious significance; indeed, washing purely for cleanliness was not habitual until recently. [515] [296]

[12] The Bella Coola state that stones are often found in the stomachs of sea-lions. One specimen, considered of great value, was seen; it was indistinguishable from a water-smoothed river pebble. [823] [825]

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* 556 575 [535] the best songs they have made for the initiates, and any of the *sisaok* members of the audience desiring to "help" the initiates dance to them, even X himself on occasion. By "help" no material aid is indicated; such dancing merely displays a friendly and sympathetic interest. The initiates, resplendent in *sisaok* head-dresses, appear at the door of the back-room, and sometimes dance a few steps. Occasionally, at the conclusion of his song, a lad's parents, or other relatives, bring forward the goods which will be later distributed by X to the guests. On other occasions, this is reserved for the following day. Food is distributed and all disperse.

THE POTLATCH: SECOND DAY

On this, one of the two most important days of the whole ceremony, the following rites take place.

During the Day

[553] (1) Communication to the foreign guests of the new *sisaok* names of the initiates concealed within the back-room; these names are the ones that have been made known to the Bella Coola before the potlatch proper.

(2) Payment to X by the members of his wife's family of the goods necessary to rebuy her from her husband.

During the Evening

(3) Repayment by X of debts owed to members of his own village.

(4) Return of a dead relative of X to visit the living.

(5) Distribution of presents to validate this appearance.

(6) In some cases, dancing by some of the *sisaok* initiates.

● [575 574] Early in the morning X gives each of his guests a wash-basin with the other necessary appurtenances for cleaning up, and towards noon all of those invited reassemble in his house. Three river canoes have been brought in and are ranged, two parallel to the side walls, and one parallel to the back wall, all far enough out to permit people to sit behind them. Boxes containing large quantities of red elderberries and olachen

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a man, *ux·winaisa*, with the prerogative of enforcing obedience to river taboos. Ever since, the owner of this name, when it has been duly legalized, has had the right to perform this function. In some cases, such as carpenters and singers, the validation of a prerogative has not brought with it the necessary ability, so that the incumbent remains a properly ratified, but non-functioning, craftsman. No mechanical skill is required by a River Guardian, hence the owner of the name *ux·winaisa* has always been able to perform his duties.

From time immemorial certain restrictions have been enforced concerning the river: No refuse may be thrown in, otherwise the olachen would remain in the ocean. For the same reason, women at certain periods are not allowed to bathe lest a speck of blood should blind the fish and prevent them from seeing the route. Occasionally an olachen with red eyes is caught; this is caused by some heedless woman. When the fish are running in the river, women are not allowed on the bank, nor to repair the nets. At high tide, it is forbidden to drive stakes for olachen nets.

The number of prohibitions increases during the critical period of the salmon run. Then no freshly hewn planks can be set afloat, and even a canoe which has just been completed must be kept for ten days before launching. No one whose husband or wife has died within the last year can embark at the village, but must proceed to a landing-place at the head of the fiord. Most important of all, refuse of salmon must be deposited in the woods; if thrown into the river, the fish would smell it and avoid the stream. Even accidents such as the upsetting of a canoe, or the spilling of olachen grease, are considered to be offences.

Disregard of any of these injunctions is displeasing to the salmon and it is the duty of the River Guardian to punish the offender, irrespective of his rank. In case of slight infringements, he beats the guilty person or throws him into the river. The guilty person usually scrambles out, but should he be swept away and drowned, no recompense can be claimed by

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ever object was desired, and then set in a window of his house so that the sun could fall on one uncovered end. The owner firmly believes that this stone has brought him money on various occasions, and will do so again, though whether he expects the coins to be found inside of the wrapping, or merely to come to him in the course of trade is questionable. According to Bella Coola belief, they ought to appear beside the stone, but as this man attributes any good fortune to it, he never has any difficulty in proving its powers.

This stone is also used as a means of increasing the efficacy of prayer. When its owner washes ceremonially in the river before eating in the morning, he rubs it over his body as if it were soap and requests it to make him strong, make him well, grant him his desires, and so forth.

Shamanism

More important to the Bella Coola than any other manifestation of the supernatural is that power which makes an individual either an *ălukwala* or an *ăskankots*. The former is a person who, owing to ability granted him by a supernatural being, is able to perform miraculous feats, especially in curing the sick; the latter is one with similar powers obtained from a ghost.[2] It is impossible to translate either of these terms accurately; the designation "shaman" is accordingly used in this monograph to describe both types of supernaturally endowed individuals. The most common and most important method of obtaining such power is from a living supernatural being; a person receiving the boon in this manner will be termed "shaman," and one empowered by a ghost will be known as "shaman from the dead."

The Bella Coola believe that long ago men were so much more powerful than at present, and so close to the supernatural, that all were virtually shamans. The prowess and adventures

[2]Ghosts are, of course, supernatural, but as the Bella Coola distinguish between shamans whose powers are derived from these two sources, it is accurate to follow their example.

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is spoken of in the Chinook jargon as a *mesatche box*, that is, a "dirty," "unclean," or "repulsive" box, and this term is one which is mentioned whenever an unexpected death takes place, or whenever a coastal Indian is accused of loitering around a deserted camp or of stealing into another's house. The belief is not limited to the Bella Coola, but has formed the basis for criminal cases all over the coast of British Columbia. It is difficult to find words sufficiently strong to express the disgust, loathing, and fear with which the Bella Coola regard a person suspected of sorcery.

Ability in this respect carries with it certain prohibitions. A sorcerer would lose his power if he should wash or blow his nose except when about to commit murder. The one old Bella Coola now thought to be a sorcerer never washes; he knows that if he did so, he would be immediately accused of plotting someone's death. This man is greatly feared, as he is said to have a collection of spittle from every member of the tribe; efforts have been made to break into his house and steal this, but it has never been found. He takes credit for the death of at least one white man in the valley. A peculiar impediment suffered by all sorcerers is a prohibition against turning around, although no one knows why doing so should deprive them of their strength. The explanation may be that their power would recoil upon themselves, a concept well illustrated by the following incident:

When the first Christian Bella Coola left the old village to settle near the mission station, they were regarded with dislike and suspicion by their fellow-tribesmen. One day, one of them happened to follow a path through the woods which led her to a rude shelter in which was a bundle. Hastily summoning her fellows, they opened it and found an article of clothing belonging to each Christian. The man who told this incident described his fear at finding a dirty shirt of his own among the others. They felt that the garments had been collected by a young man who claimed to be a shaman, but whom they suspected to be merely the accomplice of a sorcerer, and this was soon proved to be the case. He was insufficiently trained; instead of touching the patient's body with his stick, he used to suck wherever the pain was located and then

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[The Dance of Wil·a]

*575 *796 houses. The night's ceremony concludes with a meal and the admonitions of the marshals.

No further description is needed of the rites taking place the next day, that of *nusiutälsap*, when a second song is composed, again dealing with X's patrons, and wood for masks is cut. The evening's ceremonial does not last as long as that of *lsuxtämem*.

[532] [302] [515] The next day, *qotlim*, the carpenters work at the masks, some of which must be finished by nightfall. Late in the evening both *kukusiut* and uninitiated prepare themselves by painting and washing; at this time the young men provide pans of warm water for their female friends. As already described, the *kukusiut* are the first to enter, followed by the uninitiated when all is ready. In Kimsquit they see the masks [184] of at least some of X's supernatural patrons suspended by cords of dyed cedar-bark from a sloping pole that stretches from the floor at the base of the back-room to the cross-beam behind the fire. It is said, although the informant could not guarantee the truth of the statement, that long ago masks had to be displayed at this dance, though it was optional at others. It is a serious and sacred time, one at which frivolity is quite [688] out of place, and the marshals are in readiness to punish any offender. One very old informant told of having seen a marshal strike down and kill a *kusiut* from another house for holding intercourse with a woman on this night. The heralds *[203] [537] stay near the door, repeating and enlarging on the remarks of the marshals; the fluency of these functionaries always adds appreciably to the success of any Bella Coola rite. On this occasion X and the dancer of *Noäkxnim* must perform, followed by those who have danced in former years, according to the desire of the singers; later in the season, when many *kukusiut* have performed, the rite may continue almost till dawn, for all must dance. After the departure of the uninitiated the *kukusiut* eat leisurely, while a marshal addresses them, commenting on the ritual and, perhaps, asking a man

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[The Stomach-cutting Dance]

* 575 * 796 533 The singers have also composed a song for each of the *ănuyex* and these too must be practised, while the men dance or remain still as they think fit. Since no uninitiated are present the affair is purely a rehearsal. The words of each of these songs is of the manner in which the patron helped X to survive his ordeal. By this time it is late and the *kukusiut* disperse after the usual meal and admonitions of the marshals.

* 575 * 796 532 The next day, *qotlım*, the carpenters assemble early in the morning to start work. Since X is entitled to portray any of the supernatural beings who are companions of his patron in the land above, it follows that there is wide variation in his choice of masks to be manufactured. The principal supernatural beings are always shown, and any animals, since all are supernatural, can likewise be displayed. As usual, a few *kukusiut* are invited at midday to share the meal provided for the carpenters. The number of masks to be provided is often so great that two days or more are necessary for their completion, in which case no ceremony takes place on the night which would normally be *qotlım*; the *kukusiut* merely gather and again practise their songs.

[533]

* 575 * 796 But the day after is *qotlım*. At dusk the *kukusiut* are called in for a final rehearsal of the songs, and then a summons is sent to the uninitiated, who have been washing and beautifying themselves in eager anticipation. In Kimsquit it is customary to hang some of the masks on a sloping pole behind the fire and the sight of these amazes the non-members. First the singers beat out the song of one of the women mourners and she dances in time to it, while the heralds near the door keep up a steady stream of remarks, encouraging the woman to perform yet more strenuously and to have no modesty about shaking her breasts. Then another of the women dances, followed in succession by the third and fourth if that is the number who sang the mourning songs. Next the *ănuyex* perform, each in succession accompanying the song composed for him. Now comes the central feature of the evening, the performance of X himself. As the singers strike up the shaman's song which he is

[515] [532] [184] [781] [535] [834]

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to the aesthetic, their skill in dancing and dramatics is noteworthy: no one who has witnessed a native dance can fail to have been impressed by the performance of the participants and the stage-craft of the carpenters. The fact that no system of writing had ever been devised has prevented the establishment of a native literature, but the practice of passing down an extensive folklore by word of mouth shows their narrative powers as well as their faculty for remembering details. At present it is difficult to appreciate what must have been their energy in earlier times when they faced the struggle for existence, armed with stone tools. Abundant salmon gave them adequate food, but only when weirs had been built with great labour. Though game was plentiful, the hunter was equipped with nothing more formidable than a bow and arrow. The simplest task required patience and skill undreamed of by the average white man. If the reader will allow his imagination to carry him backwards two hundred years, he will realize that the mere provision of food and clothing necessitated constant effort and ceaseless exertion.

Hand in hand with many admirable characteristics, the Bella Coola display others which strike the white man as unprepossessing. A first impression is the untidiness of their houses. Exteriorly, they are often fairly neat, but confusion reigns within. Clothing, instead of being hung up, is left lying on the floor; bed-coverings are piled carelessly; dirty dishes cover the tables; dogs and children swarm over the floor; flies abound; all is dirty and slovenly. The house itself may be uncompleted; a window lacks glass and has been boarded up; the roof leaks, or the steps are falling down. Nor are the surroundings more attractive. There is one struggling flower-bed in the village, but elsewhere the houses are surrounded by wastes of mud where horses and cattle wander, dogs prowl, and children play. In the distance the mountain peaks rise in splendour, but near at hand all is squalid and unkempt.

They are only slightly more particular about their personal appearance. Dirt does not distress them. They wash occa-

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sionally, in a half-hearted manner, but it is not unusual for a man to allow the basin of water in which he makes his ablutions to remain standing for two or three weeks. Not many years ago the Carriers taught their neighbours to make a kind of soap from the ashes of burnt cottonwood sticks thrown into water; with this clothes are washed irregularly and in most cases from sheer necessity only. In former times bathing was a semi-sacred rite, but this fell into disuse with the passing of the old religion, and the use of soap and water merely for the sake of cleanliness has not become a daily habit. The women have more vanity; the younger girls especially like to have new clothes, though they wear them carelessly, heedless of fit. An effort is often made to clean up for ceremonial dances, but it entails little more than the removal of the more obvious dirt and the putting on, over unchanged undergarments, of a sweater. Pride in personal appearance, love of tidiness, delight in a clean house, are all quite foreign to the Bella Coola.

Probably the reason for lack of comforts in the houses is simply that the people do not feel the need for them. They consider it no hardship to sit on a rickety chair, scoop up food from a common dish and, if they think of it, throw morsels down to the dog or the cat. The smell, the flies, the dirt, the chaos do not concern them. Capable of undergoing privations, hardships, and even sufferings, they think neither of the comfort of themselves nor of others. Their domestic animals are often treated abominably, not through lack of affection or cruelty, but from callousness. More than once the writer has seen a favourite dog steal a piece of food from the table. Its master, after a furious blow or kick at it, would suddenly, as if by inspiration, throw a choice bit to the animal, saying:

"Why, he must have been hungry!"

Though the Bella Coola feel a kinship with animals unknown to the white man, it is not combined with any recognition of their feelings as living creatures. There are, of course, many exceptions, but on the whole public opinion demands generosity and kindness only towards human members of the group. The moral code is not concerned with animals.

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Axaxlds: Village near mouth of the Dean River.
Axaxlidzim: Man mentioned in an ancient story.
Axaxpaw-gut, "Lobrected": Village in the lower Bella Coola valley.
Axaxwmisis: Name obtained by an *Ayaklaxt* man in the beginning of time.
Axayalmaut, "Quivering To and Fro": One of *Nusqalilaw*'s names and hence a designation given to shamans.
Axaxtimlis: *Kwixt* name of a Bella Coola man.
Axaxtmaxa: 1—*Kwixt* name of a Bella Coola woman.
2—"Left Hand": *Dzoxa* repository named from part of a supernatural creature. [431]
axaxyp: Term applied to the giving of a copper, indicating that 100 per cent interest is expected in return. [426]
Axayimukmut: One of the names of Great Blue Heron as chief.
axaxwixshaw-aix: *Kwixt* profession, at Kimsquit only, of throwing masks on the fire. [463]
Axaxwixtwuth, "The Moving House": One of the names of the supreme god's dwelling.
axayus: 1—Owner of a puppet-person.
2—Synonym for *alaxaxaxmaxus*, q.v.
Axayulthailaix: Supernatural being who robs *kukwixt* of their thoughts at the Mystery dance.
Ax-ax: 1—Name created for himself by one of the first settlers at *Ayaklaxt* in the beginning of time.
2—Bella Bella chief.
ayo: Excreta.
Ayut'a, "The Privy One": Name taken by a chief for himself in virtue of the remarks made about his habits.
Ayulaix: *Kwixt* name of a Kimsquit man.
ayum: Herring eggs. [525]
aymuxlp: Cottonwood. [824]
ayna: Type of sea-going canoe. [825]
Ayuxtsyaxmaxmux, "The Constant Eater": Term used by hunters to Eagle.
Azaz-ax-i, "Concave Town": Village in the middle Bella Coola valley.
Az-ewmxtp: Canoes lashed together.
Az-ax: Locality on south side of North Bentinck Arm, about one-quarter mile from its head, including the area beneath the surface of the water.
az-ka-xi: 1—Second oldest sibling. [601]
2—Second part of song.
azlaxtmux: 1—"They Who Have Become Supernatural": Title preferred by ghosts. [775]
2—Woman living in the moon.
Az-iewmxtp: Inhabitants of the village of *Azaz*°.
az-mumxtis: Person with good memory commissioned to remember family prerogatives. [424]
Azaz°, "At the Head": Village southwest of the head of South Bentinck Arm.
azlaxtit: Totem-pole, *literally*, "Outside Post."
azlaxlaxs: Shaman with power derived from ghosts. [752]
azlaxlaxus: Ceremonial bathing at dawn.
Azlaxwilaix: *Kwixt* name of a Bella Coola woman. [515]
Azlaxwlik: *Kwixt* name of a Bella Coola man.

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atâlw: Omen of death, generic term. [787]
atâlx: One of the berries, probably raspberry.
átmi, nemítte, átmas: Mother, term used by child. [824]
Átmaltem: Celebrated Carrier chief.
Átmas: 1—Village on west bank of the Necleetsconnay, about three-quarters of a mile from the sea. [601]
2—Mountain behind the village.
Átmcpentmem: an'hl'a name of a Kimsquit man.
átmtemíla, nemítte, átmtemíla: 1—Term used for spring salmon during the ritual following the first taking of the fish. [825]
2—Term used by *xmmq* to human beings, who are like salmon to them.
3—Salmon, in the language of supernatural beings. [198]
áwmtin, "Rope Fastenings," i.e., something binding: The function of the "Bed Covering" and other presents given with a wife which bind her to her husband. [585]
áw-lhak: Unidentified species of duck. [431]
Áwmtsmaka: Kwakiutl term for "The Weeper," a female supernatural being.
Áxpátsa: *Kaxlaí* name of a *Átsas* man. [825]
Áy psaak: *xmmq* chief living soon after the beginning of time.
Áyyá'ák: Herald who came with the first settlers to the Dean River in the beginning of time.
Áyáx: Carrier pronunciation of *Tsáyáx*, one of the first men to settle on the upper Dean in the beginning of time.
ázámam: *Kaxlaí* with ability to produce a puppet-patron, cf. *nemayamam*.
ázátsta: Sweet-herb. [515]
Bálamas: Slave mentioned in an ancient story.
bátty': Star-fish. [825]
bíz: Rabbit.
cá q: Salmon-berry. [824]
Cáclamák: One of the first men to settle at Schooner Pass in the beginning of time.
cáyamás: Unidentified plant. [825]
calem: Black seal.
cam, "A Wiping of the Feet upon the Ground of Chiefs": Term applied to a deadly insult offered to persons of importance. [578]
camis: Wooden armour. [714]
Camkáis: 1—Village on east side of South Bentinck Arm.
2—Island off Rivers Inlet.
3—Island.
Cay-awmsim: One of the names of Raven as chief.
Cel: 1—One of the first men to settle at *Sikhlaí* in the beginning of time.
2—One of the first men to settle at *Átsas* in the beginning of time.
ce-ka: Unidentified migratory bird, black in colour. [825]
Cekíjut: Scotch River, near Bella Bella.
c'ápa: One of the *c'alk* dances.
Cápla, "Head": *Átsas* repository named from part of a supernatural creature. [578]
cecpápkaskaskaynam: A verbal exposure of what should have remained concealed, such as comments upon the slave ancestry of a person whose blot in this respect has been covered over by lavish giving. [431]
cíkskíkstas: Presents distributed by a wife to strengthen her husband's seat, and thus prevent him from "wobbling." [552]

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754
756 magic probably originated from observing the many very erratic
825 and apparently purposeless movements of the red squirrel.

When one wished to cause the child of one's enemy to grow
754 up to be a quarrelsome person, a yellow jacket's nest was burned
825 and the ashes were rubbed on the face, hands, and arms of the
856 child. When the child grew up, it was believed, he or she would fight with everyone. The yellow jacket's natural defense of it's nest is interpreted as quarrelsome, even by white people.

754 The toad was a powerful medicine for the bad box used in
825 witchcraft.

To make a man or woman die of craziness, one of the hairs of the person's head was put in the body cavity of a disemboweled toad.

[515] To make a person's face swell and superate until death came,
[825] the little pieces of softened red cedar bark used to clean the person's face were put in the body cavity of a disemboweled toad. The idea underlying this was probably the reproduction of the warts of the toad on the face of the person.

[824] To make a person die, a piece of the young shoot of a thimble berry, lost by that person while eating, was put in the mouth of a toad. Death was supposed to take place in half an hour.

754 One very old man, Judas by name, boasts of having killed seven people by means of his bad box used in witchcraft, especially of having caused the death of Mr. John Clayton, who was the first white man to remain long in this area, having kept the Hudson's Bay store at Bella Coola, and later a store of his own, but who died far away from Bella Coola in 1909.

Mrs. Samuel King who died in 1922 was said to have been poisoned by Willie Mack. Her father, Captain Schooner, was said to have stated that Willie would die in July on the anniversary of her death. Willie Mack died in the summer of 1923. Captain Schooner died a few days later. He was said to understand malevolent witchcraft thoroughly. It was said that people often cut off the collars of Willie Mack's shirts. Willie Mack's father was too great a chief in that people were ashamed, and consequently killed Willie by means of witchcraft with something in a bad box.